

Testimony of Maribel Rodriguez
Before the Public Safety & Security Committee
March 3, 2022

**In Support of HB-217: An Act Establishing a Hate Crime Investigative unit within the
Division Of State police**

Good morning members of the Public Safety and Security committee. My name is Maribel Rodriguez, a resident of New Britain and a Graduate Student at UConn's School of Social Work. I write in support SB-217: An Act Establishing a Hate Crime Investigative Unit within the Division of State Police and requiring development of reporting systems, best practices and a model investigation policy for law enforcement unity regarding hate crimes.

Prior to the pandemic, hate crime incidents have occurred and have been underreported due lack of understanding of where to report. This is a systemic issue. Following the Covid-19 pandemic. The numbers of hate crimes continued to rise against all different races and ethnicities. As a Hispanic woman, I have witnessed hate language in white dominated spaces. About two-thirds of U.S. Hispanics (68%) say that if people passed them on the street they would describe them as Hispanic or Latino and associate them with specific characteristics. Notably, Black and Latino Americans are being hit hardest by this economic crisis because of the structural and institutional racism that preceded it. Former president, Donald Trump, has spewed racist rhetoric that has only facilitated and emboldened white supremacy, referring to Covid-19 as "the Chinese flu" and dehumanizing the racial and ethnic communities of our nation, which only increased hate crimes.

People are living in fear of simply being a part of a specific group of people. Since the Hate Crime Advisory Board was created there have been more reports, but underreported data remains to be an issue. According to FBI statistics, 59% of victims were targeted because of race or ethnicity, 20 % of victims were targeted because of religion, and 15% percent because of sexual orientation. These numbers show the need for a hate crime unit which would bring justice to the victims affected by hate crimes. The FBI also reported that 50% of offenders were white. These numbers show the need for investigation and research on hate crimes, there is still a lack of reporting due to victims not knowing where to go to report and what will be done if they do report. Communities of color deserve a positive relationship with law enforcement and to feel comfortable reporting these instances. I'd hope that there would be implementation of well trained and informed law enforcement who understand the importance of this work.

As a latinx woman, knowing that there will soon be a unit that is dedicated to reporting and analyzing the data of hate incidents makes me feel safer to live in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Maribel Rodriguez

